LESBIAN HEALTH CARE

Definitions

Sex: the anatomic distinction between male and female
Gender: the societal construct that is associated with men (masculinity) and women (femininity)
Sexual behavior: sexual activity
Sexual orientation: sexual and emotional attraction to another person
Sexual identity: expression and self-perception of one’s sexual orientation

Tips for Visits and the History and Physical

• Encourage the use of office intake forms that include “transgender” under gender and “partner” instead of “husband/wife”
• Promote the posting of non-discrimination signs, including those regarding sexual orientation/gender identity, on the walls
• Sex, sexual behavior, sexual orientation and sexual identity are NOT synonymous → do not assume one from another
• Use gender neutral language, such as “partner,” when inquiring about relationship/sexual history
• Ask if you may document patient’s sexual orientation/behavior and discuss issues of confidentiality

Resources

www.amsa.org/gender - AMSA’s Gender & Sexuality Committee
www.lgbthealth.net - National Coalition for LGBT Health
www.pflag.org - Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays
www.glma.org - Gay and Lesbian Medical Association
www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth - Centers for Disease Control & Prevention
www.nctequality.org - National Center for Transgender Equality
Lesbian Health Disparities

1. **Cancer** – Increased risk for breast cancer
   - Risk factors include obesity, nulliparity, alcohol consumption, and decreased breast cancer screening\(^1,2\)
   - Increased risk of gynecologic cancers, compounded by the fact they receive less frequent gynecologic care than heterosexual women can increase morbidity/mortality\(^3\)

2. **Obesity** – Lesbians more likely to be overweight or obese than heterosexual women\(^4,5,6,7\)

3. **STIs** – Little research done, but women who have sex with women (WSW) can still transmit all STIs
   - Increased rates of bacterial vaginosis\(^8\)
   - For WSW who have sex with men as well, have higher risk for acquiring HIV than heterosexual women\(^9\)

4. **Substance Abuse** – More likely to drink and experience alcohol-related problems\(^10\)
   - Higher rates of cocaine and marijuana use\(^11\)
   - Found to smoke more than heterosexual women\(^12\)

5. **Cardiovascular disease** – May have increased risk due to higher rates of obesity and tobacco use than heterosexual counterparts\(^13,14,15\)
   - Risk compounded by the fact that lesbians seek health care less often than heterosexual women and consequently, less likely to receive blood pressure and cholesterol screening

6. **Mental disorders** – Depression rates comparable to heterosexual women\(^16\), but relationship satisfaction and support system are significant predictors\(^17,18\)

To view references, please visit [www.amsa.org/lgbt/wcc.cfm](http://www.amsa.org/lgbt/wcc.cfm)